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TAGORE

PROPHET OF A NEW VISION

By

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The eternal Dream is borne on the wings
of ageless Light
that rends the veil of the vague
and goes across Time
weaving ceaseless patterns of Being.
The mystery remains dumb,
the meaning of this pilgrimage,
the endless adventure of Existence,
whose rush along the sky
flames up into innumerable rings of paths,
till at last knowledge gleams out from the dusk
in the infinity of human spirit,
and in that dim-lighted dawn
she speechlessly gazes through the break in the
mist
at the vision of Life and Love
rising from the tumult of profound pain and joy.

Rabindranath Tagore

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I

In his poem addressed to Victor Hugo, Tennyson called the French Author :

“ Victor in Drama, Victor in
Romance,
Cloudweaver of phantasmal hopes
and fears,
Lord of humam tears, Child-lover
and Weird Titan by the weight of
the years

As yet unbroken . . . ”

All these epithets and many more can be applied to Rabindranath Tagore. The extraordinary versatility of his genius branches out into practically every branch of human culture. In every field of activity his contributions, rich and varied, stand supreme. As a poet and a man of letters he has tried all phases of literature—couplets, stanzas, short poems, ballads, longer pieces, short stories, fables, fiction and prose romances, operas, *kirtans*,

palas, farces, comedies and tragedies, songs and, last but not least, lyric poems. He has been a success in every phase of literature he has touched but he has succeeded in the last phase of poetry beyond measure. His essays are illuminating, his sarcasm biting, his satires piercing. His estimate of the old poets is deeply appreciative, and his grammatical and lexicographical speculations go farther inward than those of most of us.

It is indeed a marvel that one of the greatest forces in the renaissance of his own native Bengali literature, he should also have become one of the greatest masters of contemporary English prose. His literary works in English have, in the words of a noted English writer, "made a definite and peculiar contribution to the totality of modern English literature, to which he has given something that has no exact counterpart."

Son of a *maharshi* and himself a *rishi* the Poet was blessed with leisure, competence and intellectual equipments of a high order and a charming presence. Nature seems to have designed him for the career he had chosen and the mission he had

received from Nature, from society, from education and from his early associations. He has interpreted Indian philosophic and religious thought to bring out its underlying message of freedom for the human mind. His social philosophy reflects a Religion of Humanity.

In the decline of his life he emerged out a painter,—a painter who confused and baffled classification. They are neither what is known as the Indian Art, nor are they mere imitation of any ancient or modern European paintings. They tell no story yet display a bewildering wealth of romantic fancy. The pictorial work of the Poet presents to our admiring gaze that immense part of his dream which he had spoken already in his famous stanzas :

“ I comprehend the voice of the stars and the silence of the trees. One day I would meet, outside myself, the joy which resides behind the screen of light. . . . ”

Words of fire lighting up the whole future ! Man takes a time to attain a clear knowledge of himself. Suddenly he knows, and then again he does not know.

Tagore the magician, who with his fingers raised, without fear of any check, had attempted to pacify the furious winds, and who declares to have cured, with his intense will-power, the mortal sting of the scorpion, is timid before his creations, to the fineness and brilliance of which each one of us is a witness. It must be recalled that it was he who supplied the inspiration—the seed thought—of the modern Indian school of painting founded by his nephew, Dr. Abanindranath Tagore. This famous artist acknowledges his debt to Rabindranath in these words :

“ Bengal’s poet suggested the lines of (Bengal’s modern indigenous) art, Bengal’s artist (Abanindranath himself) continued to work along those lines for many a day. . . . ”

By his insistence, in his writings, on the use of artistic things in everyday life as well as by his personal example and encouragement Rabindranath has definitely contributed to the revival of Indian, particularly Bengali, traditions in our arts and crafts.

The two institutions with which the

Poet was closely associated were Santiniketan and Sriniketan. Many will say that they were mere dreams, but they were not the dreams of ordinary people, but the dreams of a world Poet. His school at Santiniketan, where children learn and grow in an atmosphere of freedom and culture in living contact and kinship with Nature, stands as a monument to his genius as an educationist. Rabindranath's immediate object was to found school where the youth of impressionable age would live a happy life ; where study would not be divorced from life ; where the inmates would participate in one communal life ; and live in harmony with the surroundings of Nature. But the underlying ideals reached far deeper.

The forest homes of ancient India had a special message to his mind. The *Message of the Forest* occurs again and again, almost like a refrain, throughout the Poet's writings in verse and prose.

“ The forest, unlike the desert or rock or sea, is living ; it gives shelter and nourishment to life. In such surroundings the ancient

forest-dwellers of India realised the spirit of harmony with the universe and emphasised in their minds the monastic aspect of truth. They sought the realisation of their thorough union with it."

His gospel of self-help, service and sacrifice brought about a deep national consciousness in the early decades of the present century, and he became at once the poet and prophet of the new nationalism which Bengal gave to India. His were the greatest songs of her aspiring liberty ; his was the creation of the first of all-human prestige of the modern Indian man.

The music of his verse, and often of his prose as well, which fills the outer ear is but an echo of the inner harmony of humanity and the universe—"the music of the spheres"—which exists at the heart of the things and which he has caught and made manifest by his writings. How wonderfully full of real life and colour and motion and variety ! His songs and lyrics exhibit a most consummate development of romantic poetry. Nature in her playful and fierce moods, simple humanity, the

sublime and the beautiful, love, liberty and beauty, old tales of heroism and sacrifice from the store-houses of Indian history and legend and from the Buddhist scriptures, the child, song-birds—these are the themes of his poetry, and he has treated them with singular felicity. A lyrist and song-writer of his type exquisitely phrasing all the finer moods of the mind it is difficult to find in the entire range of the world's literature. The natural magic of a Wordsworth, the intellectual mysticism of a Shelley, the aesthetic felicity of a Keats, the philosophic passion of a Browning, the word-painting of a Tennyson, the mystic fervour of a Vaishnava poet, the magic richness of suggestion of a Kalidasa—all these come across in his finest pieces.

As a dramatist Rabindranath resembles Shelley, Browning and Maeterlinck and has not produced any acting play of an appreciable value. His plays are all lyrical and symbolical, dealing more with unseen than with the seen, more with ideas and ideals than with concrete realities. The very soul of the drama—action, which is the resultant of the play and the inter-play of passions in its principal characters—is

wanting in his dramas, which at the bottom give scope to his talent for spinning out cobwebs of idealism. His hymns and sermons and some of his other writings let us unconsciously into the secret of his access to the court of the King of kings, nay to His very presence, and of his communion with Him. Thence he has brought us the message :

“ Be lovingly one with humanity,
one with all things that live, one
with the universe, one with Me.”

Insight and imagination are his magic wands, by whose power he roams, where he wills and leads his readers thitherto. He has familiarised us with the finest elements of Western thought, and has brought about a remarkable synthesis of the culture of the East with that of the West. This is particularly seen in his love poems. He has lifted love to an imaginative height never dreamt of in Bengali poetry. He has caught up the far-flung radiations of passion in the magic web of his poetry. Before him there were certain stereotyped moulds in which love was thrown to be treated more as a convention than as an authentic experience.

There was nothing to indicate that the thrill of love had ever been felt by our earlier poets. The manner in which Rabindranath transformed it and introduced into a new fermentation, a new thrill of passion is indeed wonderful and the credit is all the greater when we remember the trammels within which Bangali literature is bound. He is able to give expression to a range and width of feeling, a rapture, and an ecstasy that seem to be quite unknown to the cramped soul of Bengal. So in his works of Bengali literature he has outgrown its provincial character and has become fit to fraternise with world literature. Universal currents of thought and spirituality have flowed into Bengal through his writings.

II

An endeavour to get together the elements of his philosophy would be of value if by so doing we can have a clear and harmonious presentation of a rather diffused and complex subject. The Poet, however, has very little of a reasoned systematic philosophy. His mind is too mobile and universal to allow his realisations to crystallise into a well-defined, well-set-out philosophical doctrine. His is a philosophy of open mind and heart, a living, growing thing which attains perfection through and in the midst of experiences. He is one of the line of our ancient religico-philosophical teachers whose religion and philosophy are woven fine into one component whole. Both his poetry and prose embody philosophy—one of the latest prose-works being *Religion of Man*.

Even to a casual student of the Poet's

works it must have been apparent that he has an exquisite and a wonderful source of optimism to draw from all kinds of circumstances including the dreariest and India has need of a comforting and inspiring philosophy more than anything else in the crisis of modern civilisation. It is curious that in the entire range of his works there is not perhaps a single instance where Tagore indulges in a mood of tearful pessimism or sings seriously of despair, of fatigue, of weakness, of fight. Every man great and small has his moods and every poet has his. But Tagore in his literary works at any rate displays only one mood, a mood of unfailing courage, unshakable faith in the future and an unlimited fund of good cheer. One cannot fail to conclude that there must be a philosophy of life behind an optimism of this kind, that there must be an idea or ideas firmly rooted in the Poet's mind which give to it this peculiar character and colour all his other ideas and most of his feelings.

We are not in a position to trace the origin and growth of these ideas in detail, their influence on the life and living thought of the Poet at every step in the course of

this small thesis. We shall attempt only a bare outline of the growth and meaning of a few of the most important of these ideas. The first and the most important of these basic ideas may perhaps aptly be called *his cult of the wayfarer*. Unlike most of the other poets, mystics and philosophers his call is very seldom to the people who are weary of life to come and grope into the cool shades of beautiful unrealities and thus to soothe the fever of unreality. His call is ever towards the reality which is unrealisable, towards the far-away, the unseen, the impossible. It is not an escape from life and action that he preaches but the release of life and action from the prison of a smaller self. He holds forth no promise of a kingdom of heaven, no lure of an eternal beatitude, no *nirwana*. He believes in just going ahead, following the urge of a truer and a larger life in oneself which leads nowhere in particular and yet leads. It knows no way, this life urge ; but it is capable of creating a way where there is one.

The keen call of this way which waits to be created came to his ears when he was still a youth, in the shape of a blind,

helpless yearning for the far-away, the unknown. He had not yet fully recognised it to be a call of the Road and the pilgrimage had not yet begun. Says he :

“ I am restless. I am athirst for far-away things . . . O Great Beyond, O the keen call of the flute ! I forget, I ever forget, that I have no wings to fly that I am bound in this spot evermore.”

When the pilgrimage begins, it begins as meaningless wandering of spirit.

“ I was walking by the road, I do not know why Slowly I returned upon my steps, I do not know why.

“ I run as a musk-deer runs in the shadow of the forest, mad with his own perfume I lose my way and I wonder. I seek what I cannot get, I get what I do not seek.”

Slowly this *wander lust* grows into a passion in him, and finds a passionate expression in a series of his early poems which, but for all that follows, later would appear to have been written more in

jest than in any serious mood.

“For years I have gathered and heaped up scraps and fragments of things : Crush them and dance upon them, and scatter them all to the winds. For I know, it is the height of wisdom to be drunken and to go to the dogs.”

But even in those youthful days of exuberance the Road ceased to have any real illusions for him. If his faith in Road itself was not so great from the very beginning, Tagore at this period might almost be considered a pessimist, his philosophy a philosophy of tears, notwithstanding the not quite serious tone of a good number of the poems.

“Though the evening comes with
slow steps and has signalled for
all songs to cease ;
Though your companions are gone
to their rest and you are tired ;
Though fear broods in the dark and
the face of the sky is veiled ;
Yet bird, O my bird, listen to me,
do not close your wings.”

Though occasionally he speaks of the

pilgrimage in terms of the delightful imagery :

“ I hunt for the golden stage ”
yet when the great pilgrimage begins at last, even death is no longer a fulfilment of life, she is merely a companion at a game to be played on the roadside in which one has to leave one's bed of dreams, fling open the door and come out.

“ We are to play the game of death tonight, my bride and I.

The night is black, the clouds in the sky are capricious and the waves are raving at sea.

We have left our bed of dreams, flung open the door and come out, my bride and I.”

With the passage of years the journey at times seems to acquire a little meaning. There is now and then a vague suggestion of Someone in front who is for ever calling. But this Someone is always in the dim distance and is always a total stranger. It is true that the strangeness itself is like unto a lure :

“ The veiled face of dark doom lures you ”

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but beyond this the Poet knows nothing. So it is the Road once again which only he knows and he must love for its own sake.

“ The Road is my wedded companion
... My meeting with her had
no beginning, it begins endlessly
at each daybreak, renewing its
summer in fresh flowers and
songs, and her every new kiss is
the first kiss to me.”

There are at times questionings and doubts

✓ “ Why does this foolish heart recklessly
launch its hope on the sea whose
end it does not know? ”

What makes the pilgrimage worth while ?
What the prize for which the race is to be
run ? The answer comes quite readily :

“ Just the joy that is in the running.”
All he hopes for is wayfaring, all his
love is for the way, his life fills with
the intoxication that is in the ever-re-
newed pleasure of wayfaring.

He is speaking of the Way he loves
when he says :

“ I shall know you by the thrill in the
darkness, by the whisper of the
unseen word, by the breath of

the unkown shore."

of the way that leads nowhere, which is its own fulfilment, when he says of his beloved :

" I know not if I have found him, or I am seeking him everywhere : if it is a pang of bliss or of pain."

Even when his beloved is at his very door, he does not think of inviting him in, he leaves the house and goes out with his Beloved in silence ; which is very significant, as it proves that his love is incapable of fulfilment unless it is found on the Way."

" Stand mute before him for a while gazing into his face ; Then leave thy house and go out with him in silence."

" Is it the Destroyer who comes ? For the boisterous sea of tears leaves in the flood-tide of pain . . . The call comes from the land of dimness beyond your ken . . . Accept your Destiny, O Bride ! Put on your red robe to follow through the darkness the torchlight of the Bridegroom."

It is enough for him to know that this road is King's road, the King whom he has not seen and the expected letter from whom never arrives.

“ It leads me I know not to what abandonment, to what sudden gain or surprise of distress. I know not where its windings end —But my King's Road, that lies still before my house, makes my heart wistful.” *→ post office*

Again and again he makes it clear that he does not care where the road leads to nor for what there may be at the end of it.

“ I felt I saw your face and I launched my boat in the dark . . . If the sails droop, if the message of the shore be lost, I will sail onward.”

The rest is all hope for the sake of hoping.

“ ‘ Traveller, how far is the sea ? ’

‘ How far is it we all ask.’

‘ Traveller, what if the night overtakes you ?

‘ We shall lie down to sleep till the new morning dawns with its

lover's gift

songs and the call of the sea floats in the air.' "

Hope never appears to him as a promise of deliverance from the miseries of existence. Who speaks of deliverance? He asks :

" Deliverance? Do you not know our Master Himself has taken upon Him the bonds of creation? That he is bound with us all for ever? "

Who speaks of perfection or finality? It was a fool among the gods who cried out on the day following creation, " Somewhere there has been a break in the chain of light and one of the stars has been lost." In the deepest silence of the night the stars whisper among themselves and smile, because they know. Nothing has been lost. Eternal perfection is over all. But then he says to the universe in time, the Eternal Fugitive :

" The moment you are perfect in your wealth, you have spent everything and are bankrupt. That is why you are always pure. Should you in sudden weariness stop for a moment,

the world would rumble into a heap, and even the least speck of dust, would pierce the sky throughout its infinity with an unbearable pressure."

It is difficult for the finite understanding to conceive movement without a direction. But the infinite covers all the points in every direction by its own magnitude ; so whatever movement it can have, must be within itself and on its own axis. Mr. H. G. Wells, the passionate futurist, insists on including God in the evolutionary process. But Tagore does not ^{has} believed in the perfectibility of the world in that sense. For him, the world moves from perfection to perfection, so it is perfect and imperfect at the same time. Life, the great demiurge, is neither for good nor for evil, it is conceived of as both good and evil. It is the urge of self-expression in eternal playfulness.

"The little flute of a reed Thou has carried over hills and dales and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new."

He believes in life that is free and creative :

“Look at the road that we have
made with the tread of our
footsteps.”

In its individual aspect, life is poetry, a love-lyric of unsurpassable beauty, a singing in ever-renewed harmony, a harmony composed of such notes and counter-points, such dissonances resolved or left suspended, as birth and death, love and hatred, progress and dissipation, memory and forgetfulness. It may have many proximate ends, but it has no ultimate end in the infinite.

“It was whispered that we shall sail
in a boat, only thou and I, and
never a soul would know of this
our pilgrimage to no country
and to no end.”

The idea of the Eternal Pilgrimage, of evolution without a design, occurs in Tagore's poetry with a surprising frequency. Those critics who speak glibly of the quality of dreamy sweetness in Tagore have perhaps failed to be impressed by the strength and force of this idea which in many places is almost static on account of its very intensity. But almost in all the poems of *Balaka*, and in many of his

earlier poems his lyrical enthusiasm, as it carries the idea, rushes on with a force which is atomic, they resound with a music which is of the spheres.

This idea finds its most sustained and elaborate expression in that wonderful drama of movement, *The Cycle of Spring*. Its very first song sounds the keynote of the philosophy round which the delightful web of the musical drama is woven.

“ I hear the Wayfarer, he calls me by my name as he goes. O, he makes it hard for me to stay indoors.”

|| In the world of this drama, the South-wind, the Bamboo Grove, the Bird's Nest, the Flowering Champak, all are Wayfarers, all are pilgrims. But it is a pilgrimage to Nowhere, a wayfaring in playfulness. Its young men are such dare-devils that they are not afraid of work ! As they must play, they just convert their work into play. They refuse to grow old or wise, they refuse to let their flowers wither so that there may follow a harvest of fruits. They rejoice in the idea that their road will lead them nowhere and that their voyage will bring them to no shore.

Frosty winter is none other than spring in disguise. ~~Youth and old age~~ play an eternal hide and seek and every time youth wins. Above it all Joy of Eternal Life rolls on, and all sorrows, losses and wastage are nothing on the shores of its infinity.

Post Office, which is much earlier work, sets forth in a simple allegorical form the same yearning of the Poet's heart for the Unknown, here symbolised in the great out-of-doors.

Gitanjali is principally a song of the Way. Again and again the same exuberance of the pleasure of wayfaring, the same longing for and trust in the "Unknown" ring out in its pages again and again till it becomes almost a monotony. Even God, though He is not like the Invisible King of Mr. H. G. Wells a struggling and self-perfecting creature of evolution, is nevertheless a wayfarer.

"O Wayfarer, thou art the comrade of all wayfarers.

To take to the way is to come to thee."

And again :

"Comrade of the road,

10 b-1-1
Here are my traveller's greetings to
thee,

O Lord of my broken heart, of
leave, taking and loss, of the grey
silence of the dayfall.

My greetings of the ruined house to
thee !

O Light of the new-born morning,
Sun of the everlasting day,

My greetings of the undying hope
to thee !

My guide, I am a wayfarer of an
endless road,

My greetings of a wanderer to
thee."

But in *Balaka*, a Flight of Wild Cranes,
a volume of about fifty of his mature
poems, this cult of the wayfaring finds its
most perfect lyrical expression. *Balaka* is
the supreme victory of Tagore's poetical
genius. It is one of the marvels of the
world. The language of *Balaka* is a divine,
incalculable felicity, the diction untram-
melled and vigorous, the imageries copious
and beautiful, the music sublime, the
imagination folding within its sweep the
entire universe of thought and matter.
In the depth, subtlety, strength, wealth

and originality of its ideas it is unique. We find in it at their perfection all the qualities that are characteristic of Tagore : the meditative calmness of Wordsworth and the lyrical enthusiasm of Shelley, the haunting and elusive beauty of his designs and the subtle sympathy that is his spell. In a supreme moment of ecstasy the creation comes seeking an entrance into the Poet's dreams, to whisper its secrets to him. In the light of that dream he looks afresh at the universe and sees with a shudder a flight of wild cranes, the mad intoxication of stormy winds in their wings. That intoxication is in every line of *Balaka*.

W. f. Suddenly, the mountains begin dreaming of floating away to nowhere in particular like a mass of wandering clouds. The trees flutter their branches and wriggle to free themselves from the bondage of the earth. The leaves of grass become restless on the fields. The entire creation becomes home-sick for the Far-away and the Unattainable while it sings :

“ It is not here, it is not here.

It is somewhere else ! ”

This eternal longing of the Unknown

and the Unattainable, this Life-Urge is not a blind impulse for movement. It is not instinct. It is not even intuition merely. Its roots are imbedded in *Ananda* or a synthetic Joy.

III

We now come to the Poet's idea of all-pervading, everlasting Joy, that carries forward in a swaying dance of ecstasy this eternal flow of evolution, of ever-repeating creation.

♥ Joy is essentially a thing of harmony.

✧ Where there is conflict, discord, anti-thesis, it is all struggle and misery. We cannot realise the highest happiness so long as we are thinking of ourselves only, of our needs and gratifications. Not until the sun of wisdom shines and melts away these selfish limitations, not until then will rise from within our true power, which is inexhaustible. An unrivalled passage in the *Upanishads* tells us that in the vastness of infinitude (*Brahman*) alone lies the fulness of happiness for man never in the infinite and little (*Alpa*). ~~M~~an go on groping here and there to gratify their desires and they often gain what they

covet, but it never satisfies their deep craving. We enter into our true state of being only when we forget ourselves ; we must lose all self-consciousness and enter into the greater harmony of things, and partake of the *Ananda* that is in the Infinite. Then shall we be able to exclaim with Browning :

“ Every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
By power and insight) more
enlarged, more keen.”

Or :

“ How good is man’s life, the mere
living ! how fit to employ
All the heart and the senses for ever
in joy.”

One must be able to transcend all single delights and pains and be able to say with Shelley :

“ All these together grow through
which the harmony of love can
pass.”

When we are conscious only of the Infinite One and when our thought is wrapped up in that one, our whole being is flooded with a new life and joy. Tagore

sings in one passage :

“ Within the finite, Oh Thou Infinite,
Thou playest Thy own tune.
Hence so rapturously is Thy
manifestation in me.”

True joy is not for those who rear walls of adamant on all sides, splitting up and labelling the things of the world as godly and Satanic, spiritual and material, worldly and other-worldly and then raising the banner of partisanship, enter into the conflict. Tagore tells us that Good and Evil are the two aspects of the same reality. In that great unity of *Ananda* all opposites shade off and merge into one another, evil into good, death into life, darkness into light, the finite into the Infinite. Like Emerson the Poet believes that a universal spiritual tidal life overflows into individual lives, working independently of own efforts, when once we have allowed its ingress. It is a life that makes for righteousness. We are possessed of it. Our individualities indeed are like islands lapped around by an infinite sea. Those who admit its influence are linked to one another by a social solidarity of spirit. All the works of the Poet are

replete with a sincere and high-minded endeavour to dispell antitheses. He teaches us to adapt ourselves to all things and taste their harmony. These characteristics of his poetry rank him among the great exponents of transcendentalism like Shelley or Emerson. Shelley's transcendentalism was chiefly lyrical, an immediate result of his emotional intensity. It is possible to measure the amount of pleasurable sensory excitant necessary to make an individual of a sensitive nature cry out :

“ So sweet that joy is almost pain.”
or in the opposite direction to exclaim :

“ Weeping till sorrow becomes an
ecstasy.”

But is, nevertheless, transcendentalism of a poet, and Tagore abounds with similar expressions and sentiments :

“ My joy today seeks a pretext to
melt into tears.”

As the Poet says in the *Creative Ideal* :

“ To detach the individual idea from
its confinement of everyday facts
and to give its soaring wings the
freedom of the universe, this is
the function of poetry.”

Emerson stands at the other end of the

same road. His transcendentalism is almost exclusively intellectual. He looks at Nature from "two removes." He deals mostly with ideas and has a wonderful capacity for abstract thought. Tagore's transcendentalism forms a bridge between Emerson and Shelley and covers the entire region of thought and emotions and still appears to transcend their bounds. He is never content with less than All.

"All things that lie scattered in my life and in my death, let my song pour like oblation at thy feet."

If his conception of God as the wayfarer and his cult of the way was the result of a process of slow realisation, he seems to have been born with this capacity for transcendental thought and feeling. Even when a young man and probably a lover, he writes :

" ' If there be a stray flower for me,
I will wear it in my heart. '

✠ ' But if there be thorns ? '

✠ ' I will endure them '

✠ ' Yes, yes I know you modest mendicant,

You ask for all that one has. ' "

In the warmth of his heart the con-

This is a very fine book
but not suitable for 1st-year
students nor for B.Sc. students
because of its philosophical nature

tending facts of every day would melt "into one sweet harmony" and are fused into greater truths of unity. Pleasure and pain are thus only the love sports of his celestial beloved.

{ "I love the game, O Lord, this game of laughter and tears . . ."

{ "Misery knocks at thy door and her message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love tryst through the darkness of the night."

His love transcends the line that superficially divides separation and nearness.

{ "Because I have grown to believe that my love is only near and have forgotten that she is also far far away."

{ "The question and the cry 'O where?' melt into tears of a thousand streams and deluge the world with the assurance, 'I am.'"

Where love is, distance and proximity come closing together and one united in wedlock.

"It is the most distant course that

idea
comes nearest to thyself, and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of tune."

"Dying you have left behind you the great sadness of the eternal in my life. . . . Clasped in your dear arms, life and death have united in me in marriage bond."

The souls of two lovers cannot touch each other unless they touch each other in the Infinite. Music fills the infinity between two souls, this become muffled by the mist of our daily habits.

5.5.
"On shy summer nights I sit up in my bed and mourn the great loss of her who is beside me. I ask myself, 'when shall I have another chance to whisper to her words with the rhythm of eternity in them.' Make up my song from thy langour, rend this screen of the familiar and fly to my beloved there in the endless surprise of our first meeting."

Infinity is thus the only suitable setting for a love in which form and the formless may unite to the best advantage.

“ I dive down into the depth of the ocean of forms hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless. . . .

“ Into the audience hall of the fathomless abyss where swells up the music of tuneless strings, I shall take the harp of my life.”

And the familiar can come smilingly forward to introduce the unfamiliar. Because he loves this life, he knows he shall love death as well. Life has been good : every dawn has unfolded some fresh surprise : and who shall say that our passing behind the barriers of the moments and years may not be to experience the grandest surprise of all. For the same unknown will appear in the death as one ever known to him, just as she had once appeared in the form of his mother and had taken him in her arms at his birth. And when the cycle of births and deaths has taught us all we need to learn : when we have passed through the “ many mansions ” of the Father’s House : when in the shadowed garden of sorrow we have seen the rainbow of beauty born out of the storm, and the stars that shine eternal be-

hind the cloud-rack : when in the house of joy we have found the pearl of great price hidden in the wine of gladness : when in the vast sounding-house of labour we have found at last that all work must be accomplished joyously : when the fire of the workshop is transformed into the lamps of a festival, and the noise of the factory is heard like music, and the common tasks are performed with the same joy of creatorship which the poet finds in his poem, the artist in his art and the brave man in his courage—then we shall have garnered all the experience necessary, and won from life the secret hidden in the great scheme of things by the All-Loving, and be ready for union with the ocean and source of all.

The finite finds scope to be commensurate with the Infinite when the glory of love touches it.

“ Is it then true that the mystery of the Infinite is written on this little forehead of mine ?

“ Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again and fillest it ever with fresh life.

“ Infinite is your wealth, but it is your wish to receive it in small measure, to receive it through me, from my little hands.”

Because, if that was not so, if even for love the Infinite had not come abegging at our doors, God's infinity would have been like an affront to the finite creature. Our finitude would have been an unbearable shame to us.

“ Thou who art the King of kings, hast decked thyself in beauty to captivate my heart.”

We have need of unlimited space, as we must attain to infinity and that is why He has to be infinite. Our needs are endless that is why there is no end to his wealth. The Poet embodies this superb idea in that fine symbolical poem of *Gitanjali*, a poem which has all the simplicity and beauty of a parable. The beggar had sighted the King and felt that the luck of his life had come at last, when

“ Of a sudden the King holds out his right hand and says, ‘ What hast thou to give me ? ’ Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg ! ”

✓
From his wallet he took out a little grain of corn, and gave it to the King. When at the day's end the beggar goes back home, and empties his bag, lo, there is a least little grain of gold in the poor heap. Bitter were the tears that he shed when he realised what would have happened had he had the heart to give the King his all. Thus it is, that He gives only to take, and takes only to give.

We have not reached the highest message the Poet has for the modern mind until we have considered his mystic consciousness of God. It is really a *yogi* and not a poet who says,

✓ “The sun and stars cannot hide thee
✱ from me for aye. . . .”

But then look at this :

“ Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight. No, I shall never shut
✱ the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch shall bear thy delight.”

Senses are glorified and accepted when the sting of sensuality is removed from them, when they no longer cater to the

ego in man, when the glad renunciation of the self in a larger self is complete. When we dedicate our body to God we come into conscious possession of our whole being full of complete illumination and learn to live in unbroken contact with our source. We shall find within us an inexhaustible store of refreshment : all the pleasures of the senses become a holy and divine.

“ What divine drink wouldst thou have, my God, from the overflowing cup of my life ? My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to thine own eternal harmony ? ”

And then finally and together :

“ Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song,—the joy that makes the earth flow over in riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers, life and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest shaking and waking all life with

laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the red lotus of pain and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust and knows not a word."

As the Old Testament Psalmist proclaimed the folly of attempting to *escape* God by fleeing from the world, so the Poet proclaims the folly of trying to *reach* God by flying from the world. We are not to become ascetics. We must have the courage to say : ' God is in this very spot and here at this very moment.'

" The quality of the infinite is not the magnitude of extension, it is the *Advaitam*, the mystery of unity. Wherever our heart touches the One, in the small or in the big, it finds the touch of the infinite."

So these are some of the ideas which the Poet has bequeathed to the new consciousness of India. It will be seen that the philosophy of the Poet is as sober as well as an inspiring philosophy. It is a philosophy of free action and unlimited good hope. It is also a philosophy of abounding Joy, and what is more needed for India

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today than freedom, hope and joy ?

Then his philosophy reflects the real illumination of India, the India of the *Upanishads*, an illumination which he re-vitalised in an astounding manner. In its collective aspect it is India's synthetic cosmopolitanism, and attitude of the open mind characterised by a love of the universal which is in view today in the great humanising tendencies of our politics, in *neu*-Romantic movements in our literature and art, in the various religious movements that are based on a comparative study of world's religious systems, and in the outlook on life among the younger generation generally. The Poet's cult of the open way asserts a freedom of the human spirit that India for several centuries had forgotten. It will not be easily realised what this declaration of freedom of the human spirit means and what wide and far-reaching changes it ultimately may effect in our national character. Today we are being hampered at every step by a sense of doom, of subjection to a Fate inexorable which lies like pall on the consciousness of our people and does not permit the free light of the skies to enter there. There

is no doubt that the Poet's philosophy with its message of undying hope and faith ought to go a long way to soothing and paralysing wounds sustained by our nation in its peculiarly unfortunate career through the ages. It ought to instil new life and vigour into limits that have become lifeless through a long and continuous practice of depressing auto-suggestion. Often we realise that the Poet holds for us those vital secrets of life which generally elude our grasp, and apart from which our modern world, with all its developments, has not been able to make real and lasting progress.

✕ “Not only to acquire,” he would say, “is life's secret but to realise.” A new meaning is given to life and history when we are able to grasp Tagore's predominant, frequently occurring ideas which supply the inspiration of joy or Ananda. joy

IV

As he has denounced Nationalism in his book of that name, taking the word to mean that organised form of a people which is meant for its selfish aggrandisement, even at the expense of other peoples by foul, cruel and unrighteous means, and as he is among the chief protagonists of internationalism, his profound and all-sided love of the motherland has sometimes not been evident perhaps to superficial observer. But those who know him and his work and the literature he has created, know that he loves his land.

Wonderful "With love far brought
From out the storied Past and used
Within the Present, but transfused
Through future time by power of
thought."

His penetrating study of and insight into the history of India and Greater India

have strengthened his love.

His hands reach out to the West and the East, to all humanity, not as those of a suppliant, but for friendly grasp and salute. He is among the foremost reconcilers of races and continents. He has renewed India's cultural connection with Japan, China and East Indies by his visit to those countries.

The study of his writings and utterances leave us with the impression that the West can cease to dominate in the East only when the latter, fully awake, self-knowing, self-possessed and self-respecting, no longer requires any blister or whip and leaves no department of life and thought largely unoccupied by its own citizens and hence his prayer :

“Where the mind is without fear,
and the head is held high, where
knowledge is free, where the
world has not been broken up
into fragments, where words
come out from the depth, where
tireless striving stretches its arms
towards perfection, where the
clear stream of reason has not
lost its way into the dreary

desert sand of dead habit, where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action.

“ Into that heaven of freedom, my father, let my country awake.”

His politics are concerned more with character-building than with the mere vocal manifestations of that crowded department of national activity. Freedom he prizes as highly and ardently as the most radical politician, but his conception of freedom is full and fundamental. To him the chains of inertness, cowardliness and ignorance, of selfishness and pleasure-seeking, of superstition and lifeless custom, of the austerity of priestcraft and letter of scripture, constitute our bondage no less than the yoke of the stranger, which is largely a consequence and a symptom. He prizes and insists upon the absence of external forms. But this does not constitute the whole of his idea of freedom. There should be inner freedom also, born of self-sacrifice, enlightenment, self-purification and self-control. This point of view has largely moulded his conception of the Indian political problem and the best method of

tackling it. He wishes to set the spirit free, to give it wings to soar, so that it may have largeness of vision and a boundless sphere of activity. He desires that fear should be cast out. Hence his politics and his spiritual ministrations merge into each other.

When Lord Curzon partitioned Bengal against the protests of her people, he threw himself heart and soul into the movement for the self-realisation and self-expression of the people in all possible ways. He gave Bengal a great ideal to transfer her allegiance to—one that soon struck music out of the chords so long silent in her race-consciousness, and started an upheaval of her national spirit. How that spirit grew and gathered invisible strength within the span of a decade was demonstrated by the way it reacted to Lord Curzon's unwitting efforts to drive the point of his sword into it. When, however, in the course of a few years out of the fumes of the national movement emerged the spectre of terrorism, the Poet uttered his solemn voice of warning, pointing out that this new phenomenon was alien to the spirit of Indian

culture and would lead the country to a morass from which it would be difficult to emerge unscathed. It was in those stirring days that the masculine prose of Rabindranath's pen burst forth in its splendid virility, and almost eclipsed the Poet himself.

He has been equally unsparing in his condemnation of predatory instincts and activities of nations, whether of the military or of economic variety. He has never believed that war can ever be ended by the pacts of robber nations so long as they do not repent and give up their wicked ways and the spoils thereof. The remedy lies in the giving up of greed and promotion of neighbourly feelings between nation and nation as between individual men. Hence the Poet-seer has repeatedly given in various discourses and contexts his exposition of the ancient text of the *Ishopanishad* :

“ Everything that exists in this universe is pervaded by God. Discarding evil thought and earthly greed, enjoy the bliss of God ; do not covet anybody's wealth.”

In pursuance of this line of thought, while the Poet has expressed himself in an unambiguous language against the use of violence by the party in power in Russia, and while he held to the last that private property has its legitimate uses for the maintenance and promotion of individual freedom, and individual self-creation and self-expression, and for social welfare, he sees and states the advantages of Russian collectivism, as is evident from his following cabled reply to Professor Petroff of V.O.K.S., Moscow :

“ Your success is due to turning the tide of wealth from the individual to collective humanity.”

On another occasion the Poet observed :

“ Let me say clearly that I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. On the contrary, I believe that the shock of such extraneous forces is necessary for the vitality of our intellectual culture.

“ What I object to is the artificial arrangement by which foreign education tends to occupy all

the space of our national mind, and thus kills or hampers the great opportunity for the creation of a new thought-power by a new combination of truths. It is this which makes me urge that all the elements in our culture have to be strengthened, not to resist the Western culture, but truly to accept and assimilate it ; to use for our sustenance, not as our burden ; to get mastery over this culture, and not to live on its skirts as the hewers of texts and drawers of book-learning."

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